

# Lowestoft Town Hall Project

## Progress Report for September 2024 Full Council Meeting

This report covers the period to 18 September 2024.

### Procurement – main construction tender

- As noted at the August Full Council meeting, the tender period has completed, with several compliant bids received, but unfortunately all exceed our budget. The QS and design team have undertaken a preliminary Value Engineering (ie looking at opportunities to reduce costs) and have gone back out to all bidders asking them to price our VE proposals. Whilst this will reduce the overall cost, it will still exceed our budget. Delays over the winter, as we seek to reduce costs and fill the funding gap, will inevitably increase costs too, as the Town Hall's condition continues to deteriorate.
- There are multiple reasons why the project budget has been impacted. These include:
  - The requirements for a soakaway to deal with water runoff from roofs (preventing overwhelming the sewerage system). Due to the size of the excavations required, the foundations of the existing buildings could be compromised, and a complex and expensive piling solution will be required.
  - 'Slates' on the roof are actually a composite (non-slate) material and will require wholesale replacement without any resale opportunities.
  - A new electricity substation, with its bespoke brick-built housing, has added almost £200k to the overall project.
  - Provisional sums for lime plaster repairs to walls and ceilings, totalling almost £300k.
  - The cost of mechanical and electrical services – we are awaiting details from tenderers' subcontractors to understand why there is a significant increase over our previous costings (£336k).
- We have discussed the situation with the Heritage Fund and our other major funders. Whilst there is no guarantee of an increase, we are able to apply to the Heritage Fund to request an uplift in our grant, and we are working on this currently. We also have the potential to increase our Public Works Loan Board loan, currently set at £4m, provided that servicing the loan does not, in and of itself, lead to an increase in the precept – this was our promise to residents during our consultations in late 2023, when the overwhelming majority supported a loan being taken out to secure the future of the Town Hall, and we will continue to honour that. These options will be considered at the Full Council meeting.
- We have asked East Suffolk Council whether they are able to increase their support for the project and continue to progress discussions with them. Unfortunately, the Towns Fund has no capacity to increase our grant, and we need instead to focus on spending the existing grant before its expiry in March 2026. This should be achievable provided we get the project underway in early 2025 at the latest.
- Other grant opportunities are being investigated, with a potential funder for some of the conservation elements having been identified.

- One key aspect of the project is the need to get the building secured, watertight and stabilised before another winter hits. Without this, costs will undoubtedly rise further as deterioration of the fabric worsens. The time required to secure additional funds is therefore a major challenge.
- Our intention is to evaluate the tenders received, and to issue award/non award notices in mid-October. Concurrent to this, we will be working through our funding options.
- We would hope to have clarity around funding by December and be in a position to begin works early in the new year (this will depend on how quickly the appointed contractor can mobilise).

Activity Plan & Interpretation

- The recent Heritage Skills Market (held in the Triangle Market during Heritage Open Days) was a great success, with good numbers visiting and excellent feedback. Our project filmmaker, Julian Claxton, attended and has produced a short film, which we'll share shortly once editing is complete.
- I gave two talks on the project at the Heritage Workshop Centre during Heritage Open Days. Eighteen people in total attended, with excellent interest and engagement from all.
- The Heritage Officer has now been appointed following the assessment day in early September. John Chamberlain will start in early October.
- The RIBA4 interpretation design report has been published and agreed by the steering committee. We will now begin work on the detailed content.

Evaluation

- Harriet Foster, our evaluation consultant, has put together some additional data collection methods to establish baselines for economic outcomes. This will include some interviews with passers-by on the High Street, to update information previously gathered by ESC and their consultants.

Financials

Total spend to date is below:

<b>Lowestoft Town Hall Project (NL-21-00031)</b>	
<b>Spend to date</b>	<b>TOTALS</b>
<b>Budget</b>	<b>£ 9,290,089.07</b>
Actual spend to date	£ 681,868.76
<b>Balance remaining</b>	<b>£ 8,608,220.31</b>

Next steps

- During October I will be managing/undertaking the following:
  - Continuing the main construction contract tender evaluation process.
  - Revising budgets in the light of tender information and value engineering exercises.
  - Seeking additional funding to cover our budget shortfall.

- Reviewing the business plan, including research into the coworking market locally.
- Seeking quotes for clock restoration, branding and signage design.
- Developing content for interpretation and planning activity/engagement.
- Financial control over expenditure to support the above (in line with approved budgets).
- Reporting as necessary to other funders.

Sheila Moss King  
Project Manager